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FERRER SAYS BUILDINGS DEPT. FAILS TO USE FUNDS FOR SAFETY

Borough President Fernando Ferrer today released a letter to City Buildings Commissioner Richard Visconti expressing concern that the Department of Buildings places the safety of thousands of New Yorkers in jeopardy by failing to hire enough building inspectors and plan examiners. Ferrer said that the Boerum Hill explosion that killed three and the East Village building collapse offer testament to the fact that the City Buildings Department fails in its obligation to protect the public safety of New Yorkers.

"A review of City Budgets and a recent report by the Independent Budget Office highlight the glaring disparity in revenue generated by fees charged by the Department of Buildings and the expense of the staff responsible for examining plans, inspecting buildings and enforcing compliance," wrote Ferrer in a letter to Commissioner Visconti. "The failure to apply the revenues derived to examination, inspection, and compliance functions raises questions about the agency's ability to protect public safety and ensure developers safely and timely complete their structures."

Ferrer reports that the Department of Buildings projects revenues – not counting fines—of \$70.2 million from licensing fees, fees for permits and other charges in fiscal year 2001, which commenced July 1. This contrasts with FY'2001 Executive Budget of \$45.5 million, a difference of \$24.7 million. Ferrer said past budgets offered no better. The FY'00 agency (modified) budget, at \$41.4 million, contrasts with projected revenues of \$68.9 million, an even larger difference of \$27.5 million. "The recent tragedies make it imperative for the Department to use this identified agency revenue to develop a plan to hire and deploy staff to provide the needed services and protect public safety," Ferrer said.

"Without enough building inspectors, plan examiners and enforcement personnel, many unsafe sites remain tragedies in waiting," warned Ferrer. "More than a decade ago, we passed legislation and established a social club task force in the wake of the Happy Land tragedy in The Bronx. The fires in illegal house conversions and deaths and injuries that resulted make clear the need to assure the public who reside or visit homes that they can expect to be safe. New York City's stringent building and fire codes assure safety – if followed."

Ferrer concluded, "The revenue-expenses disparity engenders real concern that the Department fails to apply available resources to ensure safe building and promote safe development, in the most timely and cost-effective manner."